

MAKING BAD HEADLINES BETTER

Bad headlines can keep you from accomplishing your goals.
So, improving headlines is a task all copywriters should be ready to do.



So, how would you improve a "bad" headline?

For example, the TSA has developed a program - TSA Pre-Check - to pre-screen travelers in the US. By applying and paying a fee that covers you for 5 years, people can go through a faster security check and you don't have to take off your shoes or open your bags.

On their signup page, they could run a headline that says:

Sign Up For
TSA Pre-Check
Today

It's short and sweet, and certainly to the point, but not terribly exciting or descriptive. What if the reader doesn't know what TSA Pre-Check is or what it provides?

That's why on the TSA enrollment page they use the following headline:

TSA Pre✓®

Keep moving. TSA Pre✓® saves you time and stress.

With a 5 year, \$85 membership, you can speed through security and don't need to remove your: shoes, laptops, liquids, belts and light jackets.

APPLY NOW

Available to US citizens, nationals and LPRs.

“Keep moving” is a great way to start the headline since it emphasizes action and progress, two things travelers want to achieve. The headline also points out the benefits: “...saves you time and stress” and uses a sub-headline to further explain the process

So how would you make the following headlines better?

LOCATION:

Landing page for hulu.com
(<http://hulu.com/>)

PAGE PURPOSE:

Get people to sign up for free
30-DAY TRIAL of Hulu to stream
and watch their favorite TV shows

TARGET AUDIENCE:

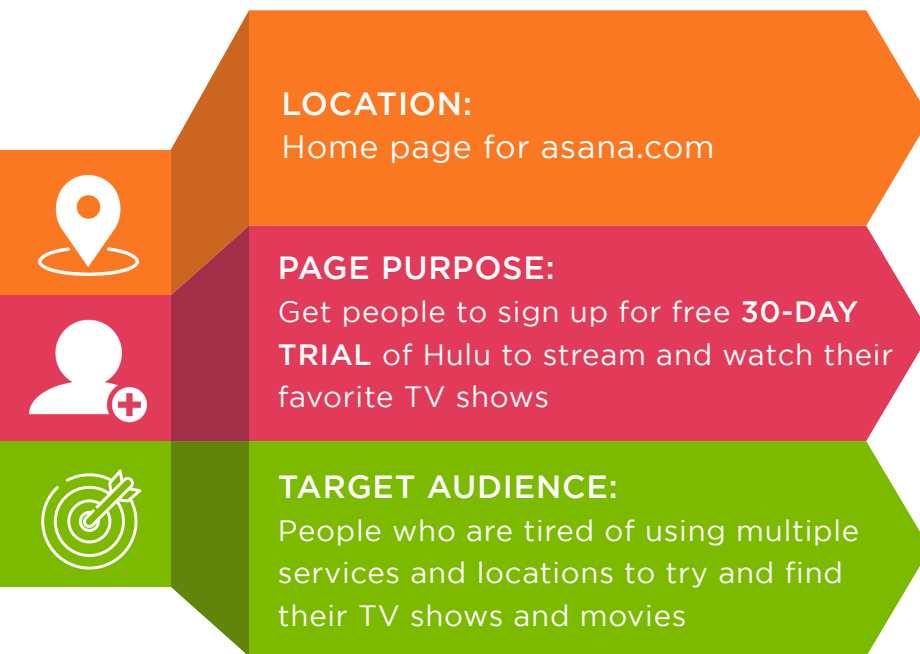
People who are tired of using multiple
services and locations to try and find
their TV shows and movies

CURRENT HEADLINE:

Stream All Your
Favorite TV Shows In
One Location Online
or On Any Device

Can you make the headline more thought-provoking or relevant to the audience?

[Hulu's solution: **"All Your TV In One Place"** - simplifying the idea, but emphasizing that value of one powerful solution]



Can you make the headline more thought-provoking or relevant to the audience?

[Asana's solution: "Move work forward" - keeping it simple and focusing on progress]



Can you make the headline more thought-provoking or relevant to the audience?

[Foodery Boston's solution: "Eat Well & Save Time"
- focusing on the 2 most important benefits]



1

RELEVANT

The reader won't read any further if it doesn't apply to them



2

VALUABLE

Headlines that offer obvious value keep readers reading



3

UNIQUE

People like "discovering" new things, so headlines that offer a new take, angle, or piece of information are more interesting than headlines that repeat what others have said



4

**THOUGHT-
PROVOKING**

Force the reader to imagine what comes next so they're compelled to read on and find out

So, how can you make your headlines great and effective?

1

UNDERSTAND WHERE YOUR HEADLINE WILL BE SEEN

Not all headlines work everywhere. Create your headline with the medium or channel in mind: blog post, product page, social media, landing page, ads, and more.

For example, headlines on corporate home pages might use inspiration to get the reader thinking about how they could use a product or service - Mailchimp's home page reads: "Build your brand. Sell more stuff." - while headlines on landing pages and ads meant to generate a sale need to be very direct and obvious - "Save 20% On Your Next Order".

2

COMBINE YOUR HEADLINE WITH A POWERFUL IMAGE

Visuals help attract attention and can improve understanding and interest with the right headline. Images are especially important on product pages so readers can see pictures of what they're buying.

With the right image, your headline could work like a caption referencing a picture or video and driving home a specific benefit or product purpose. A headline like "Setup Your Website in 60 Seconds" offers an interesting appeal but combining that headline with a 60-second video showing it's true is even more compelling.

3

WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Understand who you're writing for, their interests, and needs. If you know your reader, you'll know the kind of language they use, the topics they care about, and the words you need to use to keep them reading.

IHOP (<http://www.ihop.com/>) emphasizes size when it promotes its variety of breakfast choices with headlines like "Big Bold Omelettes & World-Famous Pancakes". Meanwhile, First Watch (<https://www.firstwatch.com/about-us/yeah-its-fresh/>) would rather emphasize the quality and healthiness of their food with a headline like, "Yeah, It's Fresh."

4

GET TO THE VALUE QUICKLY

Don't waste time - use simple, easy-to-understand language to maximize understanding. Avoid trying to make your headline too clever. Focus on your goal and the audience.

For example, the headline on the Farmers (<https://www.farmers.com/>) Insurance homepage simply reads "Get a Quote" - it's obvious what they want the reader to do - while Nationwide (<https://www.nationwide.com/>) Insurance wants you to know they've got lots to offer by saying "More than just insurance".

5

SUPPORT YOUR HEADLINE WITH THE MORE COPY

A headline doesn't have to work alone - use the headline to compel the reader to keep reading.

This goes back to understanding your format: if you know you've got multiple sections of copy below that explain benefits, descriptions of features, or visuals of your product, you can use the headline to get attention and the rest of the page to keep it.